

THE TEACHER'S LETTER BOX

Dear Letter Box:

For years I have taught second grade in a consolidated school in my home county. I have always demanded that children coming up to me really know how to read. Now our new first-grade teacher is upsetting all our policies over one boy. His birthday is in April, so he was 6.6 years old chronologically when he entered the first grade last fall. He is a big, strong child, quite well informed, and a leader in his social group. When Christmas came and he had made absolutely no start in reading, this new teacher insisted that his eyes were to blame. None of us took her seriously. Since some children just naturally take a couple of years getting started, why make such a fuss? But she talked some kind of patter about "reading readiness" and had pages of notes to show that this boy was mature enough to read in every way except eyes. Finally his parents took him to town, and the young upstart was right—he needed glasses badly.

The oculist said the boy would have to have a little time to find himself in the new world opened up to him by his glasses. But he began to show an interest in reading almost immediately and now after only a month is reading well in pre-primers. We are all happy with the parents, for we feel sure that he will learn to read next year. But his teacher won't hear of retaining him. She says he will be able to read a primer before school closes and that he can go on in second grade as well as in first. I wonder what she thinks I am—some sort of modern wonder who can teach children as individuals? For she says that I should begin where the child is and take him as far as he can go. She insists that this boy's sturdiness, his general alertness, his good work habits, and his capacity to work with the group are reasons for promoting him. I never heard of such nonsense, promoting a child because he's had a birthday and is well adjusted in his social group. I feel that he'd really be harmed by putting him in a second reader when he is only ready for a first.

Pardon this long epistle, but I'm pretty desperate. The county supervisor is supporting the boy's teacher and, what is worse, the principal is weakening. I see all the standards for which I've worked being undermined and all by a little chit of a girl with a long bob and wearing a poke bonnet tied under her chin. Since she comes from your institution, I thought you might be able to set her straight, or at least to help me see.

I can just see what will happen if this boy is sent on without reading that first reader. Parents will insist that every child in the group pass, and I don't blame them. But this new teacher disagrees. She says what happens to each child is an individual problem. She even wants to hold

one little girl back who can read a second reader; and she has about convinced the parents. Her argument is that the child needs to gain physical stamina and shouldn't be pushed and that she is socially immature. I think I know how Samson felt when the temple fell about his ears—promoting one child who reads in a primer and retaining one who is really ready. It looks to me as if this frail, timid little girl would be crushed by failing.

I'd appreciate a reply through the mail since the problem must be settled when the superintendent comes around next week.

ADA MORTON

Dear Miss Morton:

I certainly agree with you that this boy should not be put into a second reader until he reads first reader material fluently. But does he have to read this first reader material in first grade when he is otherwise well ready for second? Can't you make up one group who will all profit by beginning with first grade material? If you think he is the only one who needs easier material, then you need to study standards for passing children from one stage of reading development to the next. I think you'll find our young friend as concerned about that as you are about lines between grades. For help on this problem try: (1) Pennell and Cusack, *The Teaching of Reading for Better Living* (Houghton Mifflin Company); (2) *The Thirty-Sixth Yearbook* of the National Society for the Study of Education, "The Teaching of Reading"; or (3) Stone, *Better Primary Reading*; (The Webster Publishing Company, St. Louis.) You should also get Row-Peter-son's new reading readiness reader for the second grade, *Down the River Road*, and their free monographs on reading readiness at second-grade level.

I'd like to see you forming your second-grade groups according to stage of development just once. It doesn't really take any more time after you get the hang of it, and anyway, time is not the important matter. Pushing children into material too hard for them usually breaks down not only reading habits but general morale. And

a confused, discouraged child is in no condition to learn or to grow. Moreover, I wager that once you try this plan in reading, you'll use it in arithmetic, in spelling, even in rhythms. For you'll have some children who lack readiness for folk dancing, who can't skip. Just a little teaching in a small group for a few times will make you think you *are* a "modern wonder."

But sending this mentally alert, well-poised, vigorous young man on doesn't mean wholesale promotion. Each case must be settled on its own merits. The little girl has the right to stay another year in the first grade. She will almost surely work more happily there and make more social growth. But leaving her where she will get the most help and develop best doesn't mean she is failing. That is an adult conception left over from the old days when too often promotion was looked on as a sort of reward for work done. No child fails in a really good school, but some children need a longer time at certain stages of development than others do. Parents and teachers together should take time to study the child and make his grade placement fit his needs.

By the way, your principal should understand that he is handling a boomerang. You should take the boy, but he should provide the easy books in abundance! Tell him that I said so if you wish.

HERE'S TO GOOD OLD YALE, DRINK 'ER DOWN!

When the United Press decided to eliminate minute-by-minute racing results from its news ticker service, the alumni club of Yale University cancelled its contract; members were much more interested in racing than in any other news. The same day, the *New Yorker* comments, Jack Dempsey's restaurant wrote asking for ticker installation and approving the change of policy, as "racing news only attracts an undesirable element."

THE READING TABLE

OUR ANIMAL BOOKS: A Series in Humane Education. Primer: Fuzzy Tail by Arensa Sondergaard, 72c; Book I: Sniff, by James S. Tippet and Martha K. Tippet, 80c; Book II: Pets and Friends, by Emma A. Myers, 84c; Book III: The Pet Club, by Kathrine W. Masters, 92c; Book IV: On Charlie Clarke's Farm, by Katherine L. Keelor, 72c; Book V: Our Town and City Animals, by Frances E. Clarke and Katherine L. Keelor, 76c; Book VI: Paths to Conservation, by James S. Tippet, 88c. New York: D. C. Heath and Company. 1937.

This set of books is designed to teach humane principles as well as reading by keeping at the child's level and by using original stories which interest him, bring him pleasure, and wholesomely help him see the point intended. City and country animals are used as well as those from wild life. The texts for the lower grades have, at the end, word lists for vocabulary study; most of the books contain lists of other books at the same level, which will give emphasis to the stories in the particular book. The cover linings and the end pages are attractively and significantly illustrated; all the books have colorful pictures. They should give the teacher who is interested in this sort of development exceptional help towards her goal.

B. J. L.

THE UNIT-READING SERIES. By Nila Banton Smith. Teachers Guide for the second year, 88c; Teachers Guide for the third year, \$1.00; Practice pad to be used with *Near and Far*, 32c; Practice pad to be used with *Round About You*, 32c. New York: Silver Burdett Co. 1937.

These Teacher's Guides present in a clear, clean-cut way the problems which confront the teacher in the elementary grades, the demands made upon her by the changes in society, and definite helps for meeting these problems and demands. Especially helpful to teachers who have little source material at hand, they show how the tie-up between children's activities and literature may be made. The practice pads are constructed to give the children a variety of things to do, and the exercises are interesting and meaningful.

M. L. S.